

It's time for a Second Life Resources dedicated to the virtual world

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There's no doubt we are living in a digital world. Almost everyone's got a cell phone pasted to their ear; words such as "texting," "Facebook," and "Google" have become common parlance; iPods are ubiquitous; and laptops have become *de rigueur* in many classrooms. In order to connect with students who are more comfortable "hitting the mouse" than "hitting the books," many educators and organizations have begun to explore the possibilities of using virtual worlds as teaching tools. Currently, the most popular virtual world being used in this way is Second Life (SL).

SL is a virtual world, created entirely by its residents, that now boasts more than 15 million users from around the globe. Each participant creates a customizable avatar to represent himself or herself in the SL world, and avatars can travel throughout SL and interact with others in real-time via voice or texting.

In SL you can also own land, build environments, explore areas built by others, run your own store, walk, run, dance, shop — almost anything you can do in your first life ... and more, because in SL you can also fly, teleport and instantaneously change shape, gender, etc. SL also has its own unit of trade, the Linden Dollar, which can be used to buy and sell goods and services.

A basic account in SL is free, but in order to own land you must sign up for a premium account. For those interested in investing a larger amount of money, individual islands can be purchased. Many organizations and universities now own islands in SL including: ALA and the San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science.

SL runs on an open source platform created by Linden Lab. Soon after its public debut in 2003, many educational organizations began to discover the learning and networking opportunities SL could provide, and it is now used by organizations all across the world to hold conferences, conduct research, and advertise products.

Educational institutions are using the platform to conduct in-world classes, to keep in touch with distance-learners and alumni, and to help new students orient themselves to campus life. The building capabilities in SL allow for myriad modeling and design projects, and there are numerous areas that have been created to replicate real-life campuses, cities, cathedrals, and theaters.

For example, avatars can now visit the Glidden Campus of Northern Illinois University, attend an in-world Shakespearean production at The Globe Theatre, fly through Stonehenge, or wander the streets of Krakow. Linden Lab has also created a Teen Grid that is solely for users ages 13 to 17. The Teen Grid works just like the regular Second Life Grid, but is actively monitored to keep out material that is inappropriate for teenagers.

Educators are discovering that SL opens up learning potential for those who might be considered differently-abled. People with limited mobility, for example, are finding new freedom in their ability to walk and fly in SL and, in fact, some applications are now being developed to

allow those who are paralyzed to control a SL avatar by using only their brain waves.¹ SL has also been found to be a place where autistic youngsters can interact with others more comfortably than in the real world.² And SL has shown promise as a language-teaching tool with numerous educators offering English as a second language (ESL) classes.³ The following list presents some of the most useful Web sites devoted to SL. While no means comprehensive, this list will hopefully provide a starting point from which you can launch your own learning experiences in and around SL.

Signing up

- **The Official Web Site of Second life.**

This site, run by SL creator linden Lab, provides the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on SL. This is the site where participants can sign up for and manage their SL accounts and check for the latest news on the SL grid. Residents can also get the latest currency exchange rate for Linden dollars.



The site contains a showcase highlighting the best in-world events and creations, and also provides a knowledge base filled with useful articles on all aspects of SL. Users can access video tutorials, technical support, an official blog and the latest press releases from Linden Lab. For those interested in SL statistics, the site also provides sections on service quality metrics economic statistics. Access: <http://secondlife.com>.

- **Teen Second Life.** This site is designed specifically for 13-to-17-year-olds who are using the Second Life Teen Grid and their parents. It has much of the same information as SL's Official Web Site, and most of the links contained here click through to the information contained on secondlife.com. In addition, however, this site contains a special section for parents on how to share their teen's SL experience and on how they can help their teen stay safe when using the platform. Parents can also submit an Account Activity Request through this site. Once a parent makes the request, a message is sent within 24 hours to the e-mail associated with the account's credit card holder. The e-mail lists the hours spent in-world in the last 30 days, the Linden dollar balance, the amount of land owned, and the disciplinary status on the account. Access: <http://teen.secondlife.com>.

Getting started/connecting with peers

- **Alliance Virtual Library.** This site, created by the Second Life Library Project, is a collaboration of OPAL (Online Programming for All Libraries) and the Alliance Library System. The purpose of the project is "to extend the programs currently offered online to librarians and library users to the Second Life virtual environment" and is therefore of particular value to those who are specifically interested in what type of library presence can be found in SL. The site lists numerous libraries and educational organizations that are represented in SL, and it contains a

calendar of in-world library events, such as book discussions, workshops, meetings, and exhibits. Access: <http://www.infoisland.org>.

- **Second Life Insider.** This is a great site for tutorials and in-depth discussion on a wide variety of topics. It has articles specifically geared toward those who are new to SL, covering such topics as clothing, moving around, chatting, and marketing. There are also many articles of interest for those more experienced users who are ready to experiment with some of the programming capabilities of SL. Unfortunately, the site is no longer updated. It suspended publication on November 2, 2007 when the creators premiered a new site devoted to news about all massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) [www.massively.com/]. Even though the *Second Life Insider* is no longer being updated, the site contains viable and valuable information. Access: <http://www.secondlifeinsider.com/>.

- **Second Life Mailing Lists.** Here one can find mailing lists that users can join to learn more about SL. The site provides a brief description, subscription information, and application forms for each list. Several extremely useful mailing lists can be accessed through this site, including one for SL educators. Access: <https://lists.secondlife.com/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo>.

Enhancing education

- **New Media Consortium (NMC).** NMC is an international organization with nearly 300 members dedicated to the use of new media and technologies to spark learning and creativity. Its membership consists of educational and arts organizations from around the world, although the largest percentage of members by far come from the United States. NMC sponsors an Emerging Technology Initiative, which has as its centerpiece The Horizon Project. Since its launch in March 2002, each year The Horizon Project has culminated in an annual *Horizon Report*, which details the latest discussions surrounding applications of the newest technologies to learning and creativity. A full-text version of every issue is available on the Web site. While the NMC site is not solely devoted to the use of SL, it has much pertinent information for educators who are interested in using SL to enhance learning. NMC runs its own campus in SL and can therefore provide firsthand information on the benefits and pitfalls of using the platform to host an educational environment. Access: <http://www.nmc.org>.

- **Second Life Education Wiki.** This wiki is part of SimTeach, an organization that provides "Information and Community for Educators using Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUEs)." It is Linden Lab's official resource for educators in SL, and is one of the most useful collections of information for those who are new to the platform. The wiki, administered by Jeremy W. Kemp, an instructional designer at San Jose State University, contains clear, step-by-step instructions on numerous important topics, such as getting started, technical essentials, finding peers, and safety issues. There are also useful sections on in-world groups, classroom management, lesson plans, teaching resources, and educational locations. One of the most valuable sections of this wiki is the list of institutions and organizations using SL. Although it is not a comprehensive list, it is a good starting-point for finding peers who are already using the SL platform in their teaching or programming. Access: <http://www.simteach.com>.



- **Second Life in Education Wiki.** Created and maintained by SL experts Jo Kay (SL name: jokay Wollongong) and Sean FitzGerald (SL name: Sean McDunnough), the site provides general information on using SL in education and links to useful resources for educators. This is an extremely useful site for those who are just beginning with SL and want to know how it can enhance classroom and long-distance learning. The site offers a comprehensive list of the ways in which SL is currently being used in teaching and contains links to numerous educational projects. The site also contains useful pages on getting started with SL and on establishing an educational presence. Both pages provide clear, step-by-step instructions. Access: <http://sleducation.wikispaces.com>.

Keeping current

- **Linden Lab.** This is the official Web site of the corporation that created SL. The company was founded in 1999 by Philip Rosedale to "create a revolutionary new form of shared experience, where individuals jointly inhabit a 3-D landscape and build the world around them." The site contains Linden Lab press releases, multimedia content for broadcast, print and online press, and a news archive. Here a researcher can also find fact sheets about the SL economy, business in SL, the technology behind the SL grid, education in SL, and the arts in SL. Access: <http://linden-lab.com>.

- **Reuters: Second Life News Center.** The Reuters's SL News Center is devoted entirely to news about SL and is connected to a news bureau that Reuters runs in the world of SL. The bureau has two reporters, Eric Krangal (SL name: Eric Reuters), and Adam Pasick (SL name: Adam Reuters), who cover major news stories about SL and Linden Lab. The site also contains a blog written by Krangal that covers practical elements related to SL residents. Access: <http://secondlife.reuters.com>.

- **Second Life Herald.** This site was founded in 2003 by philosophy professor Peter Ludlow as the *Alphaville Herald*. It was originally dedicated to reporting on the Alphaville server of The Sims Online, but soon branched out to cover other virtual worlds. In 2004 the site was rechristened *The Second Life Herald* due to its emphasis on SL. The *Herald* is considered a muckraking publication by some as it often takes a negative view of Linden Lab and its administration. The stories found on this site often have adult themes and deal with the seedier side of SL. The site is a good resource, however, for keeping up with the darker elements and more unusual goings-on in the virtual world. Access: <http://www.secondlifeherald.com>.



• **Second life News Network (SLNN).** SLNN reports on news occurring in SL and real life stories that affect SL and its residents. The site began in October 2006 to offer unbiased coverage of SL. Regular reporters for SLNN are all SL residents who have been using the platform for at least three months. The network also accepts stories from freelance writers. Access: <http://www.slnn.com>.

Notes

1. "Brain interface lets paralyzed man walk in 'Second Life,'" Fox News. Retrieved from www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,361822,00.html.
2. T. Loftus, "Virtual world teaches real-world skills: game helps people with Asperger's practice socializing" (Feb. 25, 2005), MSNBC. Retrieved from www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7012645/.
3. B. Ruberg, "How to spark remote learning," *Forbes* (March 19, 2008). Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com/2008/03/19/life-lessons-gaming-tech-innovation08-cx_br_0319innovations.html.